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ABSTRACT

During the past 20 years, much has been written on the ethnic/racial identity development of adults. Recently, attention toward adolescents' ethnic identity development has increased; to explicate this new research, a model of ethnic identity development proposed by Phinney (1989) is explored here. The model classifies adolescents into one of four ethnic identity statuses: (1) diffused identity (little or no exploration of one's identity); (2) foreclosed identity (having adopted the attitudes and beliefs about one's ethnic group without any self-exploration); (3) moratorium (an exploration period where adolescents express a keen interest in learning more about their culture); and (4) achieved identity (an ultimate outcome where individuals who possess an achieved identity have experienced a period of exploration and have developed a sense of confidence and pride in his or her ethnic group). Some of the implications of these stages for school counselors include: the need to educate teachers and other school personnel about the impact of ethnic identity on the personal development of minority students; and they must help create a school climate that welcomes diversity and empowers students to explore their ethnic heritage. Such education is important, it is argued, since research indicates a connection linking ethnic identity development to student's academic achievement, interpersonal relationships, and self-esteem. (Contains 21 references.) (RJM)

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Who Am I? The Ethnic Identity Development of Adolescents

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Who Am I?: The Ethnic Identity Development of Adolescents

During the last two decades a substantial amount of literature has been written on the ethnic/racial identity development of adults (Cross, 1978; Helms, 1995; Parham & Helms, 1985; Sabnani, Ponterotto, & Borodovsky, 1991). More recently there has been an increase of research regarding the ethnic identity development of adolescents (Brookins, 1994; Phinney, 1989). These efforts to better understand the complexity of an individual's identity when it relates to ethnicity have rarely been discussed by school counselors and other school-related personnel.

This paper presentation will describe a model of ethnic identity development proposed by Phinney (1989). Her model is based on Marcia's (1980) theory which consists of four identity statuses: diffused, foreclosed, moratorium, and achieved. Implications for school counselors will be discussed along with possible interventions that can enhance the identity development of minority youth.

Background

Ethnic identity has been defined as "one's sense of

belonging to an ethnic group..." (Phinney & Nakayama, 1991). Many writers have suggested that identification with one's ethnic background is a critical factor in a minority individual's personal development and level of self-esteem (Gurin & Epps, 1975; Green, 1981; Maldonado, 1975; Phinney & Chavira, 1995). Recent research has indicated that ethnic identity development of adolescents is closely related to parental influence (Phinney & Nakayama, 1995), interpersonal relationships (DeAnda & Riddel, 1991), and academic achievement (Fordham, 1986; Turner, 1992).

Model of Ethnic Identity Development of Adolescents

Phinney (1989) has attempted to describe the ethnic identity development of adolescents by developing a model that is closely related to Marcia's (1966) classic work on adolescent development (see Figure 1). Marcia's theory suggests that identity is based on two components: 1) one's exploration of ethnicity, and 2) one's commitment to his/her ethnic group membership. This is the foundation of Phinney's ethnic identity model.

Figure 1 Marcia's Model of Adolescent Identity Development

EXPLORATION	COMMITMENT: YES	COMMITMENT: NO
YES	ACHIEVED IDENTITY	MORATORIUM
NO	FORECLOSED IDENTITY	DIFFUSED IDENTITY

Through a series of interviews with Asian-American, African American, Hispanic/Latino, and European/White adolescents, Phinney (1989) concluded that adolescents can be classified into one of the four ethnic identity statuses. Phinney (1989) proposed that a diffused identity is characterized by "little or no exploration of one's identity and no clear understanding of issues related to one's ethnicity." Adolescents in this status usually have not experienced or explored issues of ethnicity in their lives and might therefore have given it little thought.

Individuals who are classified as having a foreclosed identity have adopted the attitudes and beliefs about their ethnic group from either their parents or the majority culture without any self-exploration. Individuals of this classification might have positive or negative perceptions of their ethnic group depending on the images that they have been exposed to. For instance, many adolescents from families with strong ethnic pride adopt positive attitudes about their ethnic background. Nevertheless, since these adolescents have experienced no period of exploration, they would not be considered as having an achieved identity.

Moratorium is an exploration period within the ethnic identity development process. Adolescents of this status express a keen interest in learning more about their culture and the personal implications of being a member of their ethnic group. These adolescents, however, have no firm commitment to their ethnic group membership. Simply put, these adolescents are attempting to answer the question, "Who am I from an ethnic perspective?" Many minority adolescents who are experiencing moratorium have a heightened awareness of racism and other forms of discrimination. Observers might perceive these adolescents as being tense, overly emotional, and sometimes negative towards other ethnic groups (Phinney, 1988).

The achieved identity is the ultimate outcome of the identity process. Individuals who possess an achieved identity have experienced a period of exploration and have not only developed a sense of confidence and pride regarding his/her ethnic group membership but they also possess a clear understanding of issues related to their ethnicity within the dominant culture.

Studies have indicated that European/White adolescents experience less exploration of their ethnic

backgrounds but show high levels of commitment (Phinney & Ambarsoom, 1987; Phinney, 1992). Also, Phinney (1988) has indicated that biracial adolescents experience higher levels of identity conflict.

Implications for School Counselors

The ethnic identity development of adolescents presents some challenging implications for school counselors. First, school counselors must begin to educate teachers and other school personnel about the impact of ethnic identity on the personal development of minority students. Teachers, in particular, must understand the importance of group membership to the ethnic minority student. Ogbu (1987), an anthropologist who has studied the underachievement of African American youngsters, suggested that many African American students in an attempt to identify with their ethnic group, will often acquire an "oppositional identity." Ogbu believes that school success is perceived by African American students as a component of White students' identity and therefore many African American students underachieve to maintain an identity that is in opposition to the White culture's values and beliefs. Moreover, Ogbu suggests that numerous African American

students underachieve because they fear being labeled as "acting White." If true, this phenomenon creates an overwhelming amount of anxiety for African American students who desire to achieve academically yet maintain their ethnic identity.

Secondly, counselors must help create a school climate that welcomes diversity and empowers students to explore their ethnic heritage. Incorporating history and issues related to various ethnic groups within the total educational and affective curricula is one way of encouraging the exploration of different cultures. Also, counselors should coordinate special activities that enhance the self-exploration of students' ethnic backgrounds. For instance, many counselors have assisted in the development of mentoring programs and other support groups for minority students. Lee (1992), who developed a program for adolescent African American males, suggested that counselors can actively recruit community members to implement special mentoring programs for ethnic minority students. In Lee's model program, African American men from the community serve as role models for African American male students and facilitate the boys' understanding and appreciation of African American men in history. In

addition, the men attempt to develop achievement motivation and positive self-esteem among the African American male students.

And lastly, school counselors must not forget to explore their own values and beliefs regarding ethnic minority groups. Many times, negative beliefs and attitudes are perpetuated throughout the school setting by school personnel.

Conclusion

Research has shown that ethnic identity development is linked to students' academic achievement, interpersonal relationships and most importantly, self-esteem. School counselors are in a prime position to enhance the identity development of minority adolescents by developing special programs which highlight student diversity, encouraging the inclusion of culture in school curricula and most importantly, by validating students' desire to explore their ethnic heritage. Considering the rapidly increasing diversity of the public school student enrollment, school counselors of the next century must address ethnic and racial identity development to create success for all students.

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